

# Maryland Historical Trust

## Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties Form

Inventory No. T-1154

### 1. Name of Property (indicate preferred name)

historic W. A. Turner & Sons  
other \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street and number Avonia Lane \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication  
city, town Bellevue \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity  
county Talbot

### 3. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name W. A. Turner & Son, Inc.  
street and number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city, town Royal Oak state Maryland zip code 21662

### 4. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Talbot County Clerk of Court liber 427 folio 425  
city, town Easton tax map 46 tax parcel 122 tax ID number 2-085089

### 5. Primary Location of Additional Data

- \_\_\_\_ Contributing Resource in National Register District  
\_\_\_\_ Contributing Resource in Local Historic District  
\_\_\_\_ Determined Eligible for the National Register/Maryland Register  
\_\_\_\_ Determined Ineligible for the National Register/Maryland Register  
\_\_\_\_ Recorded by HABS/HAER  
\_\_\_\_ Historic Structure Report or Research Report at MHT  
\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. Classification

#### Category

\_\_\_\_ district  
☒ building(s)  
\_\_\_\_ structure  
\_\_\_\_ site  
\_\_\_\_ object

#### Ownership

\_\_\_\_ public  
☒ private  
\_\_\_\_ both

#### Current Function

\_\_\_\_ agriculture  
\_\_\_\_ commerce/trade  
\_\_\_\_ defense  
\_\_\_\_ domestic  
\_\_\_\_ education  
\_\_\_\_ funerary  
\_\_\_\_ government  
\_\_\_\_ health care  
☒ industry  
\_\_\_\_ landscape  
\_\_\_\_ recreation/culture  
\_\_\_\_ religion  
\_\_\_\_ social  
\_\_\_\_ transportation  
\_\_\_\_ work in progress  
\_\_\_\_ unknown  
\_\_\_\_ vacant/not in use  
\_\_\_\_ other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Resource Count

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	____ buildings
____	____ sites
____	____ structures
____	____ objects
<u>1</u>	____ Total

Number of Contributing Resources  
previously listed in the Inventory  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 7. Description

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### Condition

<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> altered

Prepare both a one paragraph summary and a comprehensive description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

The W. A. Turner & Sons packinghouse is located off Avonia Avenue on a branch of Tar Creek in the community of Bellevue, Talbot County, Maryland. The rambling concrete block and frame structure has reached an advanced state of deterioration. The building has a southwestern principal exposure. The building is secured, and access was not allowed by the owner of the adjacent Bellevue Seafood Company.

Built in stages beginning around 1945, the concrete block and frame structure stands directly west of the Bellevue Seafood Company on sloping site that descends towards Tar Creek. Supported on a concrete foundation, the main building is a single-story concrete walled packinghouse with a flat roof. A gable roofed frame section is attached to the north end.

The southwest elevation of the concrete block main building consists of a series of three uneven wall surfaces pierced by a variety of door and window openings. Centered in the middle section is a double door entrance with partially glazed doors. Directly north (left) of the double door entrance is a six-over-six sash window. North of the center section is a rectangular shaped concrete block section built on a perpendicular axis to the center part and lighted by a variety of window openings. A horizontal eight-pane window marks the southwest end.

Attached to the north end of center concrete block section is a single-story, gable-roofed frame structure which appears to be the oldest part with the concrete block additions built on each side. The frame wing of the packinghouse complex is partly covered with a tin roof, and the sides are sheathed with a combination of aluminum siding and tin sheets. The edge of the roof has a slightly extended eave with exposed rafter tails.

The packinghouse extends farther north with another single-story concrete block section with small frame appendages. A metal stove pipe rises from the center of the north concrete block section. The northernmost part of packinghouse is a stilted frame structure raised approximately eight feet high on driven pilings and sheathed with a exterior cover of metal sheets. The structure is covered by a low pitched, nearly flat gable roof.

The interior of the packinghouse was not open for inspection.

## 8. Significance

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Period	Areas of Significance	Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> health/medicine	<input type="checkbox"/> performing arts
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1999	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment/ recreation	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 2000-	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> ethnic heritage	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/ settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> social history
	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning		<input type="checkbox"/> maritime history	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation		<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

Specific dates

Architect/Builder

Construction dates

Evaluation for:

☐ National Register

☐ Maryland Register

☒ not evaluated

Prepare a one-paragraph summary statement of significance addressing applicable criteria, followed by a narrative discussion of the history of the resource and its context. (For compliance projects, complete evaluation on a DOE Form – see manual.)

Captain W. A. Turner established a seafood packinghouse on the shore of Tar Creek in the African-American community of Bellevue at a time when a large segment of the black population worked in white-owned seafood and vegetable packing establishments on the Eastern Shore. Begun under modest circumstances in a shed behind his house, he and his sons were able to begin a larger operation upon purchase of the town dump on Tar Creek, which provided them critical water access to the Tred Avon and open waters beyond.

Allowed to deteriorate to an advanced state of disrepair, the W. A. Turner & Sons packinghouse is the older of the two known seafood packing facilities operated by an African-American owner. The other is the Bellevue Seafood Company located directly adjacent on the separate lot. (See T-1153)

### HISTORY AND SUPPORT

W. A. Turner and Sons was founded in Bellevue, Talbot County, Maryland by African-American William Aubrey Turner and his sons John and Samuel E. Turner. They packed oysters and crabs.

In 1937 schooner captain William A. Turner had four people shucking oysters for him in a shed behind his house. He wanted to buy land and go into the seafood packing business himself, but the primary land owner in Bellevue was seafood processor William H. Valliant, who would not sell him land for a competitive packing operation. One of his sons, Samuel E. Turner, worked for a year in a Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Virginia, and he had saved \$300. This money was used as a down payment on two acres of land next to the town dump, supposedly to raise chickens. After the war the local canning industry began to collapse and the large William H. Valliant packing company closed in 1946. Turner was able to expand W. A. Turner and Sons in 1946, employing as many as 45 people picking crabs. The company was supplied by the many family members and other local watermen. Most of the crabmeat was sold to J. M. Clayton in Cambridge, who packed it under their own label. Some was sold to stores and there was a retail walk-in trade.

In the 1950s Samuel Turner, Sr. began a soft-shell clam processing operation in one part of the plant. Workers who moved up from Crisfield in the 1950s lived in a house owned by the Turners adjacent to the packinghouse. Many of these people became residents of Bellevue. In September 1956 William A. Turner died while working on an addition to the seafood processing plant. His son John continued to operate as W. A.

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Turner and Sons, but within a year stopped oyster processing to concentrate on the crabmeat business. Samuel Turner, Sr. operated a separate business processing clams, the Bellevue Seafood Company, Inc., initially sharing facilities with his brother. Bellevue Seafood continued to pack oysters on a small scale, but the companies' main emphasis during the summer months was buying and dredging clams for shucking and selling in the shell.

Samuel Turner, Sr. found that was a better market for shucked clams than for clams in the shell, and built the Bellevue Seafood Company adjacent to the W. A. Turner and Sons packinghouse, beginning in 1964. The new building opened for business in 1966 and the company incorporated October 2, 1967. Some people worked for both companies, moving back and forth depending on supply. Most of the crabpickers were women, most of the oyster shuckers were men, while both men and women shucked clams.

Bellevue Seafood Company never had a distinctive packing label; all their product was packed for dealers and bore their labels, such as the J. M. Clayton Company in Cambridge, Hanks Seafood in Easton, and Carnabuci Seafoods in Grasonville, H. B. Kennerly in Nanticoke, Old Salt Seafood in Easton, Dill Seafood in New Jersey, Bay Food Products in Baltimore, Rock Hall Seafood, United Shell Fish in Grasonville, Harrison Oyster Company in Tilghman, and Cook Seafood in Virginia. In 1969 Samuel's son Hayward returned to Bellevue from a tour in Vietnam to join his father in the business. They were joined in 1970 by another son, Edzel, who had worked for the federal government from 1964 to 1970. Both these men graduated from Morgan State University. The business prospered until June 1972 when Hurricane Agnes virtually wiped out the soft-clam population.

This began a series of difficult years for both the Bellevue Seafood and W. A. Turner and Sons, with a fluctuating supply of oysters and a decline in the blue crab catch. When the raw product was not available locally, Bellevue Seafood purchased clams and oysters from watermen in Kent Island, Grasonville and Tilghman Island, and as far away as Solomons, Edgewater, and Rock Hall, transporting the catch to Bellevue in their own trucks for processing. In 1977 Bellevue Seafood employed up to 45 people who processed soft-shell clams, and oysters, while W. A. Turner and Sons (John W. Turner, president, Leon K. Turner, treasurer, and Samuel E. Turner, secretary) employed 26 people processing crabmeat. In the off-season they caught eels that were cut and salted for bait for watermen. In 1983 Turner's workforce remained stable while the Bellevue Seafood Company's workforce had shrunk to 20 people. Bellevue Seafood began to process clams differently in the mid 1980s when it was found that blanching clams made them easier to pick. The clams were submerged in 180 degree water for half a minute, then dumped in cold water to chill.

In 1991 Bellevue Seafood employed a dozen shuckers and sold oysters primarily to a seafood market in Jessup, Maryland, and to buyers in New Jersey. In 1992 the company began picking crabs and constructed a separate area at one end of the building for the crab operation. They added two walk-in coolers, one for live crabs and one for the picked meat. W. A. Turner and Sons closed in 1996 and the Bellevue Seafood Company discontinued business in December 1998.

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W. A. Turner & Sons  
Royal Oak, Maryland 21662

Tax Map 46, Parcel 122

427/425

Sarah J. Turner, widow

to

4/25/1968

W. A. Turner and Sons, Inc.

Parcel 1 ...being shown as Lot IV on a certain plat entitled "Showing Partition of Turner Property in the Village of Bellevue, Talbot County, Maryland" December 1943, Plat 1, 217, ...together with a right-of-way Running from Avonia Avenue to the waters of Tar Creek....

257/87

William Reddie

to

12/31/1943

William A. Turner and Sarah J. Turner

Parcels 1 and 2 , survey dated December 30, 1943

257/86

William A. Turner and others

to

12/31/1943

William Reddie

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Parcel 2 Shown and designated at Lot 8 on a certain plat entitled "Map Showing property of W. S. Dawson at Bellevue, Maryland" surveyed September 1938, Liber 1, folio 109

261/354

Doyle Dawson Smith and Bryan Smith her husband

to

4/3/1945

William A. Turner and Sarah J. Turner

242/300

William S. Dawson, widower

to

9/7/1938

Doyle Dawson Smith

All those six lots in said town of Bellevue, designated as Lots No. 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 and 13

125/306

J. Edward Tyler, Assignee and others

to

5/19/1896

William S. Dawson



## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Talbot County Land Records, various volumes, Talbot County Courthouse.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of surveyed property 1/2 acre  
Acreage of historical setting 1+ acres  
Quadrangle name Oxford, Maryland

Quadrangle scale: 1:24,000

### Verbal boundary description and justification

The historic metes and bounds of this property are have been subdivided to smaller parcel from the original acreage.

## 11. Form Prepared by

name/title	Paul B. Touart, Architectural Historian and Virginia Jenkins, Business Historian, CBMM		
organization	Private Consultants	date	3/28/2001
street & number	P. O. Box 5	telephone	410-651-1094
city or town	Westover	state	Maryland 21871

The Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
DHCD/DHCP  
100 Community Place  
Crownsville, MD 21032-2023  
410-514-7600

T-1154  
W.A. Turner and Sons  
Avonia Lane  
Bellevue  
Oxford Quad.  
Tabot Co.







T-1154

W. A. TURNER & SONS PACKINGHOUSE  
BELLEVUE, TARBUR CO, MD.

TAR CREEK

1/2002, PAUL TOWART, PHOTOGRAPHER  
NEZ/MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

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T-1154

W. A. TURNER & SONS PACKINGHOUSE

BOULDER, TARRANT CO., MD.

SOUTHWEST ELEVATION

1/2002, PAUL TARRANT, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEH/MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

2003



T-1154

W. A. TURNER & SONS PACKHOUSE

BELLEVUE, TALBOT CO., MD.

SOUTHWEST ELEVATION

1/2002, PAUL TOURT, PHOTOGRAPHER

NEC./MD. HISTORICAL TRUST

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